

Section 1 Introduction

1.1 Greenways- Definition

Greenways are linear open spaces that are managed for conservation, recreation, and/or alternative transportation uses. Greenways often follow natural features such as ridgelines, stream valleys, and rivers; and cultural features such as canals, utility corridors, abandoned rail lines, zoning buffers, roadways, and wherever there is a break in the land pattern. Although each greenway is unique, most greenways are networks of natural open space corridors that connect neighborhoods, parks, and schools to areas of natural, cultural, recreational, scenic and historic significance. These passageways link people and places to nature for the enjoyment and enhancement of the community.

1.2 Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of the plan is to establish a framework for a comprehensive system of greenway and trail connections in our community that support open space preservation goals, protect environmental assets, provide recreation and transportation alternatives, and safeguard the natural, scenic, and historic resources of James City County. Adoption of the Greenway Master Plan is necessary to ensure the continuity and direction of the greenway program and its coordinated planning over time. This plan will become a component of a broader Open Space Master Plan seen as an important planning tool of the James City County Comprehensive Plan. The Division of Parks and Recreation manages this Master Plan whose main goal is to balance environmental protection with the need for recreational amenities.

1.3 Background

James City County is a rapidly developing jurisdiction located on a peninsula midway between Norfolk and Richmond, Virginia. The County is part of the “Golden Crescent” of Virginia, the name given to the area that stretches from Washington, D.C. to Richmond and the Tidewater Region. In 1990, the “Golden Crescent” accounted for 90% of the state’s overall population growth. In response to a 68% population growth rate in James City County during the 1980’s, a 36% growth rate during the 1990’s, and a projected growth rate of 38% over the next ten years, citizens and County planners recognized the need to manage growth to aid in shaping the direction and character of community development. Producing a Greenway Master Plan represents a proactive effort towards achieving those goals to preserve and enhance the quality of life for our citizens.

County Mission: “We work in partnership with citizens to achieve a quality community.”

The County’s total land area, including water, is 144 square miles. Bounded on three sides by the James, York, and Chickahominy Rivers, the geography is typical for the coastal plain with maximum elevations less than 137 feet above sea level. Water, wetlands, and resource protection areas make up approximately 41% of the total land area. Land uses are predominantly rural with generous wooded, cultivated, and scenic environmental areas throughout. The diversity of land forms, land uses, population, and climate within the County provide excellent opportunities for a comprehensive greenway system serving a variety of functions, including environmental protection, alternative transportation, and outdoor recreation facilities.

1.4 Summary of Greenway Actions in James City County

During the later part of the 1980's, citizens of the greater Williamsburg area began responding to growth management issues, which resulted in many open space preservation initiatives. Concerned citizens collectively requested jurisdictional support for a Williamsburg Regional Commission on Growth that produced a public document outlining 99 recommendations to control growth. This led to the establishment of a Regional Issues Committee, comprised of representatives from the City of Williamsburg and the Counties of York and James City. Environmentally concerned citizens began to coalesce into the Historic Rivers Land Conservancy (HRLC), whose activities included a regional planning exercise in 1993 to identify and create greenways within the Historic Triangle of Jamestown, Yorktown, and Colonial Williamsburg. Their name changed in 1996 to the Williamsburg Land Conservancy. Their activities now include the holding of property and conservation easements.

Governmental actions, responding in part to citizen interest and support, led to several greenway and open space planning efforts, as follows:

- ◆ Greenways were first introduced into the 1991 Comprehensive Plan and subsequently in the 1997 Comprehensive Plan.
- ◆ An annual \$50,000 Capital Improvement account was created in 1994 for Greenway trail development.
- ◆ The Board of Supervisors approved a one-cent increase to the real estate tax rate in 1996 for open space land acquisition.
- ◆ In 1996, a new Park and Greenway Planner position, jointly funded through the Planning Department and Division of Parks and Recreation, was created to assist in future greenway and open space planning efforts.
- ◆ A Conceptual Greenway Plan was produced and approved by the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission in March 1997.
- ◆ The Greenway Master Plan has been in process since 1997, waiting for the completion of the County's pilot greenway project, the Greensprings Greenway, located behind Jamestown High School. This project was completed in June 2001.
- ◆ A Greenway Master Plan process was developed during 2000, and methodology approved by the Board of Supervisors in February 2001. Completion of the plan is scheduled for spring 2002.
- ◆ The Board of Supervisors approved the Purchase of Development Rights Program in November 2001 to preserve and protect open spaces, the rural character of the County, and agricultural and forested land.

1.5 Historical Background

Greenways have been part of the American landscape for over 100 years. The "Greenswards" designed in New York's Central Park provided city residents with pedestrian access to natural and scenic environs to help alleviate the stresses of urban life. The interconnected greenways of Olmsted's Emerald Necklace in Boston, Massachusetts, enhanced the pedestrian movement of people to places through linear green pathways and parks. The City Beautiful movement embraced the integration of pathway connections between destination points and natural areas to help create a more pleasing community in which to live and work.

Within the past 30 years, town planners and landscape architects have responded to a resurgence of citizen requests for greenway principles hoping to create more livable communities. These citizens remembered stories of previous generations who recalled pathways along streams, fields, and hedgerows that enabled them to get to parks, schools, town centers, churches, and their neighboring friends. What began within a few neighborhoods, hoping to recapture the essence of trails on undeveloped lands, has grown into a national movement. Greenways have since become visible components in the open space plans of jurisdictions and regional planning districts.

However, the ability of any jurisdiction or region to embrace greenway concepts may be limited in their application. Many of these connections have been lost due to development of suburban neighborhoods, where large tracts of land with impregnable borders prevent pedestrian travel except along roads. Transportation corridors with superhighways, limited access roads, bridges, and tunnels further limit our ability to make connections across formidable obstacles. Even the size, character, and magnitude of our changing development patterns from rural to suburban, from suburban to urban, and neighborhoods from 20 homes to 2,000 homes, have resulted in loci fragmentation. We no longer live in places, but in spaces with gates.

Another factor limiting the application of greenways within our changing development patterns lies within zoning. During the 1950's, the orchestration of land uses into zones that were mutually compatible inadvertently segregated some land uses, such as housing, that required roadways be developed to link them. For thousands of years, the idea behind town centers serving as activity nodes placed housing, commerce, business, and community services within walking distance of one another. This is especially visible in the restored area of Colonial Williamsburg. Zoning stressed the attractiveness of land development on a site-specific basis without full coordination of all community master plan elements. The prescriptive recommendations for creating harmonious boundaries between potentially conflicting land uses employed the use of buffers to soften adverse impacts. The advent of comprehensive planning in the 1970's hoped to recapture the essence of "community" by integrating components essential to community building back into the land use equation. It was during this planning renaissance that the greenway movement was reborn.

The same planning element used to soften and "buffer" conflicting land uses in zoning has become the means to introduce greenways and trails that link neighborhoods to parks, schools, and community services. These buffer connections represent the missing linkages provided by former pathways generations ago. Greenway and greenbelt buffers recreate former hedgerows that are wider and fully able to support 21st century trails and environmental goals simultaneously.

Today's land use and zoning makes association *to* adjacent properties but falls short of creating integrated connections *between* them. Employing shared open space principles can make land uses more compatible and functional. Open spaces in traditional town planning were not viewed as left over spaces, but rather as the central fabric that connects us; the fabric that makes us one. These spaces belonged to the people and the community. The civic green or town commons was used as a gathering place for communication, information sharing, commerce transactions, and socialization. An example of this design element is evident inside our modern shopping malls,

where large indoor “plazas” allow for gatherings to occur while at the same time permitting people to move through the larger space.

Towns incorporated these essential community open spaces within the town core and in outlying areas. Many towns were either surrounded by open spaces such as agricultural fields or woodlands that served as transitional boundaries, or they were separated by natural landforms such as streams and mountains. These town boundaries helped define the unique community character and identity that aided residents in associating with their “hometown.” When a town approached the livability limits of being sustainable, an unspoken cause and effect encouraged the next generation to begin anew in another location, thereby preserving the town character ... and critical open spaces. Having lost the essence of “hometown” planning, communities throughout America began to experience sprawl.

Today, the purpose of providing community open spaces and preserving transitional open spaces is evident in park planning and the James City County’s Primary Service Area (PSA), an urban growth boundary (UGB) designed to restrict development from occurring in transitional open spaces. The allocation of parklands within the community-at-large is predominantly supported through development of active recreation components, although recent community sentiment has consistently emphasized the need for passive recreational parks and greenway hiking trails as an antidote to the stresses of contemporary life. Providing a system of interconnected open spaces, unencumbered by development and traffic, constitutes the essence of the greenway movement. We have only to look back on the City Beautiful movement to capture the essence of town planning, community character placemaking, and greenway planning, which cumulatively aided citizens in their perception, expectation, and appreciation of what they wanted their hometowns to be like.

1.6 Acknowledgements

Many people had an influence in the crafting and development of this plan over a 12-month period. The time-consuming and tedious task of reviewing and wordsmithing this document is credited to the Greenway Steering Committee and James City County Staff. Their collective efforts refined the character and quality of the text.

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